

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SAJ-01
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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4507
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I N K L TEL AVIV 0447

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IS
SUBJECT: VIEWS FROM THE PERES CAMP

1. CHARGE AND EMBOFF MET JANUARY 20 WITH ASHER BEN NATAN, POLITICAL ADVISOR TO PERES (AS DEFENSE MINISTER) AND FORMER AMBASSADOR TO PARIS AND BONN. BEN NATAN IS CLOSELY IDENTIFIED WITH PERES AND ONE OF HIS KEY COUNSELORS IN PERES' CAMPAIGN TO REPLACE RABIN. HE IS ALSO AN IMPORTANT MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE DRAFTING THE LABOR PLATFORM.

2. BEN NATAN BELIEVES THAT PERES CURRENTLY HAS A SLIGHT EDGE OVER RABIN AMONG LABOR PARTY MEMBERS. CAREFUL NOT TO ATTACK RABIN (AT LEAST FRONTALLY), BEN NATAN SAID THAT THE DOMESTIC SITUATION, THOUGH NOT ENTIRELY OF RABIN'S MAKING, LEAVES HIM VULNERABLE. MANY PARTY LEADERS REGRET THE ABSENCE OF ANY SAMLL ADVISOCW 4970, SUCH AS ALL PREVIOUS PRIME MINISTERS HAD (BEN GURION'S HAVEREINU, ESHKOL'S TROIKA, AND GOLDA'S KITCHEN CABINET), AND RESENT RABIN'S REFUSAL TO CONFIDE IN AND SEEK ADVICE FROM HIS COLLEAGUES.

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3. BEN NATAN STRESSED (AS IF TO ALLAY U.S. CONCERN) THAT THERE ARE NO DIKFERENCES BETWEEN PERES AND RABIN ON FOREIGN POLICY. THEY BOTH OPPOSE, FOR EXAMPLE, ALLON'S PROPOSAL TO MODIFY LABOR'S 14-POINT PLATFORM TO ALLOW FOR RETROCESSIONS IN THE WEST BANK WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF AN INTERIM AGREEMENT AND WITHOUT REQUIRENG A REFERENDUM (COMMENT: BEN NATAN DREW ADISTINCTION BETWEEN

"INTERIM" AGREEMENT AND AN "END OF BELLIGERENCY" AGREEMENT. HE SEEMED TO IMPLY THAT PERES DID NOT NECESSARILY OPPOSE WITHDRAWAL ON THE WEST BANK AS PART OF AN AGREEMENT ENDING BELLIGERENCY.) PERES' IMAGE OF A HAWK VERSUS RABIN'S AS A DOVE IS INACCURATE. SUCH KNOWN DOVES AS LABOR MKS YITZHAK NAVON AND YOSHI SARID, FOR EXAMPLE, BACK PERES.

4. BEN NATAN DID NOT KNOW WHETHER THE PARTY CONVENTION OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE WOULD CHOOSE THE CANDIDATE FOR PRIME MINISTER. PERES WOULD, ON BALANCE, PREFER THE CONVENTION, SIMPLY BECAUSE THE PARTY MACHINERY WOULD BE LESS EFFECTIVE IN APPLYING PRESSURE IN THAT FORUM THAN IN THE SMALLER CENTRAL COMMITTEE. HOWEVER, A SHIFT OF ONLY TWENTY-SOME VOTES IN THE PRESENT CENTRAL COMMITTEE WOULD HAVE GIVEN THE TOP SPOT TO PERES IN 1974 AND 60 TO 70 PER CENT OF THIS CENTRAL COMMITTEE WILL ALSO BE MEMBERS OF THE NEXT. AS A MEMBER OF THE PLATFORM DRAFTING COMMITTEE, BEN NATAN HAS PREPARED A DRAFT WHICH HE SAID INVOLVES FEW CHANGES FROM THE 14 POINTS. SOME FIVE OR SIX DRAFTS WILL BE PRESENTED TO THE CONVENTION.

5. BEN NATAN WAS UNCONCERNED OVER THE POSSIBILITY OF MAPAM LEAVING THE ALIGNMENT. HE THOUGHT THAT IT HAD GONE TOO FAR IN PRESENTING AN "ULTIMATUM" TO THE LABOR PARTY AND THAT ANY FURTHER PRESSURE WOULD BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE. HE DID NOT THINK HIGHLY OF YIGAL YADIN'S PROSPECTS OR OF THE LIKELIHOOD OF HIS BEING IN THE NEXT COALITION
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GOVERNMENT. ON THE POSSIBILITY OF THE LIKUD JOINING A LABOR-LED COALITION, HE FELT THAT IF IT DID NOT COME OUT FIRST IN MAY THE LIKUD WOULD PROBABLY DISINTEGRATE AS A BLOC, WITH THE LIBERALS LIKELY JOINING AN LABOR COALITION. SHMUEL TAMIR ALSO WOULD PROBABLY LEAVE YADIN'S DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT FOR CHANGE FOLLOWING THE ELECTION AND JOIN THE COALITION IF OFFERED A MINISTERIAL POST.

6. BEN NATAN DID NOT BELIEVE ACHDUT AVODAH WOULD LEAVE LABOR IF PERES WON OVER RABIN. SUCH TALK CAME ONLY FROM A FEW ISOLATED VOICES. THIS IS NOT HOW THE LABOR PARTY WORKS. ACTUALLY, ACHDUT AVODAH IS NOT A DOVISH FACTION. PERHAPS IT RECEIVED THAT COLORATION FROM ALLON'S MODERATE VIEWS AND FROM THE FACT THAT OUT OF LOYALTY HIS COLLEAGUES TEND TO SUPPORT THOSE POSITIONS. BUT ONE OF ITS OTHER LEADERS, MINISTER GALILI, IS CONSIDERED A HAWK AND ITS LATE LEADER, YITZHAK TABENKIN, WAS AN ADVOCATE OF THE "COMPLETE LAND OF ISRAEL".

7. AS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF HOW ISRAELI POLITICS OPERATES, BEN NATAN SAID THAT IF RABIN BECOMES PRIME MINISTER HE WOULD AGAIN HAVE TO OFFER A CABINET POST TO PERES BECAUSE THE LATTER REPRESENTS A STRONG ELEMENT IN THE LABOR PARTY. ONE THE OTHER HAND, AS A RELATIVE NEWCOMER TO THE PARTY, RABIN DOES NOT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT CONSTITUENCY AND THEREFORE COULD MORE EASILY BE EXCLUDED FROM A PERES CABINET. BY WAY OF ILLUSTRATION, ABBA EBAN'S LACK OF A BASE MEANT THAT RABIN WAS ABLE TO EXCLUDE HIM FROM THE CABINET IN 1974.

8. COMMENT: BEN NATAN WAS MORE FORTHCOMING THAN USUAL IN THIS DISCUSSION, NO DOUBT A CONSEQUENCE OF PERES' DECLARED CANDIDACY AND BEN NATAN'S PARTICIPATION IN PERES' CAMPAIGN. HE APPEARED CALM AND CONFIDENT, WHICH IS THE DEMEANOR THAT PERES CULTIVATES.
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Message Attributes

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